

ABQ TRIal Balloon

VOLUME 1 NUMBER 4

www.ABQTRialBalloon.com

FEBRUARY 2009

A \$50 Billion Nuke Power Bomb is Dropping Toward Obama's Stimulus Package

By Harvey Wasserman

The desperate, dangerous nuclear power industry has dropped a \$50 billion stealth bomb meant to irradiate the Obama Stimulus Package.

It comes in the form of a mega-loan guarantee package that would build new reactors Wall Street wouldn't finance even when it had cash. It will take a healthy dose of citizen action to stop it, so start calling your Senators now.

The vaguely worded bailout-in-advance provision was snuck through the Senate Appropriations Committee in the deep night of January 27. It would provide \$50 billion in loan guarantees for "eligible technologies" that would technically include renewable sources and electric transmission. But the handout is clearly directed at nukes and "clean coal."

The Stimulus Package is explicitly meant to create jobs within the next two years. But according to sources at the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, no new reactors could be licensed for construction within that time. Nor could any new coal plants. And thus the funds in this rider are to "remain available until committed." That means their "stimulus" might not go into effect for many years.

But the nuclear industry does have the ability to spend large sums of money on "site preparation" and other busy work prior to being licensed. Though the guarantees could technically be used for truly green sources such as wind and solar, the provision's backers, including Senators Robert Bennett (R-UT) and Thomas Carper (D-DE),

have made it clear that this money is meant to go for new reactor construction.

In late 2007, nuclear power's Congressional Godfather, then-Sen. Pete Domenici (R-NM), stuck a similar \$50 billion loan guarantee package into that year's energy bill. A grassroots uprising, joined by virtually all national environmental organizations, helped defeat the package. Among other things, the fight inspired a music video from Bonnie Raitt, Jackson Browne, Graham Nash, Keb Mo and Ben Harper (www.nukefree.org).

In late 2008 the industry came back again with a blank check package that went down in flames along with the stock market.

Still unable to get private financing, the industry is back yet again. In the interim, the projected cost of building new reactors has soared to more than \$10 billion each, and continues to climb steadily. Many of the previous generation of reactors came in hugely over budget. According to the Nuclear Information & Resource Service, one DOE study places the overall average overruns at 207%. But reactor projects such as Seabrook, in New Hampshire, New York's Shoreham, Pennsylvania's Beaver Valley, California's Diablo Canyon, and many others, far exceeded that.

The Congressional Budget Office now predicts that half the nuclear utilities using such a loan program will go into default. Some \$18.5 billion in loan guarantees has already been approved, apparently for such use. But its legality is being hotly disputed, and the money has not been distributed by the Department of Energy.

Washington insiders believe this latest attempt at a pre-arranged bailout has again come from Domenici, who has stayed in Washington to lobby for his radioactive benefactors after apparently retiring from the Senate in January.

This guarantee package was not part of the Stimulus Package that passed the House. Its secretive, late night inclusion on the Senate side is reminiscent of how former Vice President Dick Cheney did business for the fossil/nuclear corporations that funded much of the Bush Administration. The reappearance of this kind of back door dealing has not been well received, especially in the House.

Numerous national groups, including the Nuclear Information & Resource Service (www.nirs.org) are providing sign-ins for sending e-mails to the Senate. They also urge that you call your Senator at 202-224-3121.

Time is fast slipping by for the nuke power industry. As the popularity of renewables and efficiency escalates, the most obvious source of new jobs and prosperity has become truly green technologies. Atomic power has long since been priced out of the market. Only massive federal and ratepayer subsidies could bring it back, to the direct detriment of the revolution in renewables.

Defeating this latest money grab will help drive another nail in the coffin of the 20th century's most expensive failed technology. It is an essential step toward a truly green-powered future.

Published on *The Smirking Chimp* (<http://www.smirkingchimp.com>)

Bad Reactors: Sub-prime Nuclear Loans

By Mariah Blake

In July 2007, Baltimore-based UniStar Nuclear Energy made history by applying for a permit to build a new 1,600-megawatt reactor on Maryland's Chesapeake Bay—the first application the Nuclear Regulatory Commission had seen in nearly three decades. It has since sought approval for an additional three plants in Missouri, New York, and Pennsylvania.

Behind these bold plans is a rare and complicated business model. UniStar, a limited liability corporation, is a joint venture of two major utilities: EDF of France and Constellation Energy, a Fortune 125 company and America's largest supplier of wholesale electricity. UniStar has also spun off a subsidiary, Calvert Cliffs 3 Nuclear Project, LLC, to build the Maryland project—a structure that gives its corporate parents two layers of protection against financial meltdown.

In its promotional materials, UniStar touts this arrangement, saying it is "powering the nuclear renaissance" through "effective risk management." But its approach carries substantial risks for the American public. According to UniStar estimates,

the reactors will cost between \$4,000 and \$6,000 per kilowatt capacity to build, for a total of up to \$38 billion. (Projections from Moody's Investment Services put the costs closer to \$48 billion, roughly the same amount the United States spent on the Iraq War in 2006.) Yet UniStar's parents have only provided it with about \$400 million in assets and capital, not nearly enough to tackle a project of this size. And there is a reason for this: its plan for financing these projects rests entirely on government-backed loans.

According to testimony UniStar executives gave before the Maryland Public Service Commission, the U.S. Treasury is expected to backstop 80 percent of the total costs through the Department of Energy loan guarantee program (designed largely to encourage the building of new nuclear power plants) and possibly to put up funds via its Federal Finance Bank arm. To cover the remainder, UniStar plans to seek loans from the French import/export bank COFACE. (Both Japan and France—the two countries with the capacity to manufacture new reactors—are expected to offer guaranteed loans to companies that build nuclear plants using suppliers in their

countries, so other U.S. utilities will likely be eligible for this kind of support, too.) Under no circumstances do Constellation or EDF intend to dip into their own coffers to fund the project. "Without the federal loan guarantees, this whole thing will come to a stop," UniStar CEO George Vanderheyden told reporters before a community meeting about the Calvert Cliffs plant.

The Department of Energy is still weighing UniStar's loan guarantee applications, but if all goes as planned, the firm's corporate parents will have little or nothing at stake, while taxpayers are on the hook for tens of billions of dollars. And UniStar is not alone in its ambitions. Most, if not all, of the seventeen companies with applications for new reactors before the NRC are counting on federal loan guarantees—an unsettling scenario given that the Congressional Budget Office has found the risk of default on guaranteed loans for reactors to be "very high—well above 50 percent."

Mariah Blake is an editor of the Washington Monthly. Research support for this article was provided by the Investigative Fund of the Nation Institute.

Old Thinking, New Thinking

By V.B. Price

The elections of 2008 showed that the majority of American voters, some 67 million of them, had moved away, or perhaps had been pushed away by economic crisis, from an old, worn out kind of thinking. Voters stopped trusting the old oligarchy, what we used to call in the 1970s the "plundering plutocrats," and their rigid, one track-mind ideas.

In Albuquerque, the old oligarchy preached the gospel of growth, of sprawling growth, of limitless, unregulated growth, just like the oligarchies of other big cities in the west. They looked the other way at industries, and the military industrial complex, dumping their waste indiscriminately on the landscape and polluting the aquifer. And they pushed "inevitable" growth on the fiction of an endless supply of water.

A new kind of thinking in high desert Albuquerque has to start with water. Water is the defining limitation for growth in our region. The old way of thinking about water in Albuquerque was reductive. The new way of thinking about water has to be holistic.

Following the old kind of thinking, which pits urban users against rural agriculturalists, is the path to a desperate situation in which various water interests fight ferociously in court to retain or acquire the water they need.

Albuquerque has known for more than a decade that its aquifer was not as big as the old myths said it was. But its water policies have been decidedly old guard, despite modest efforts at conservation.

The reductive view looks at urban growth as the sole determinant of water needs. The holistic view sees the connections between urban use and rural use of water, and how the two form a complete picture when joined with urban water conservation, and aggressive water recycling. Residential and industrial water use can be fine tuned to a far greater degree than it is today, by simply raising the price of water to something near its actual value.

A little known lawsuit directed against the Albuquerque Drinking Water Project is still in state court, and poses a logical challenge to the idea that diverting river water for drinking is a wholly benign notion.

Water from the San Juan/Chama Project, which will supply Albuquerque eventually with 90 percent of its drinking water, has been flowing down the Rio Grande, undiverted, since at least 1972. Albuquerque has from time to time leased its portion of the water, some 48,000 acre feet of it, to the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District and others to help with irrigation and bosque and endan-

gered species preservation.

The lawsuit contends that when that water is diverted from the river for drinking water, a stretch of the river from Alameda to Isleta, and all those who used it, will be grievously deprived of the water they need.

The Drinking Water Project will, many rural people think, have unexamined, and therefore unintended, consequences that arise from reductive rather than holistic thinking.

Folks worry that the Drinking Water Project, which has just started diverting water, will stimulate more sprawling growth, based on a false sense of water security.

The San Juan-Chama Project relies, like most surface water sources in New Mexico, on snow pack in southern Colorado. The San Juan is a tributary of the Colorado River. Snow pack in the region has been down for more than a decade probably owing to global warming pressures. Our region is in a protracted drought. It is foolhardy in the extreme to continue old style sprawling growth, based on reductive thinking about water, when a holistic view alerts us to the sobering reality of low snow packs, protracted drought, and mega cities in Arizona and California competing with cash strapped New Mexico for Colorado water.

The old reductive way of thinking can also be seen in a law in New Mexico that rural water users have come close to erasing from the books, and are working harder than ever to remove at this legislative session. It involves urban condemnation of rural water beyond a city's boundaries.

In other words, the city of Albuquerque could, in effect, steal water from any rural area in the state, if it needed to supply is population with water. As far as I can tell, there are no limits attached to this power of condemnation. No city, so far, has used its powers of water condemnation. And if a coalition of rural water users, including tribal entities, has their way, no city ever will.

For years, water planning was in the hands solely of plutocratic interests. But a new way of thinking has taken root since 1988 when a controversy over the Pecos River between New Mexico and Texas caused the creation of 16 water planning districts in the state and required hundreds of rural and urban water users to become experts in the holistic issues of water sustainability. This enormous grassroots body of citizen expertise acts as a potent counterbalance to the old competitive way of thinking.

There can be no winners and losers in water disputes in New Mexico. It's a delicate balance that must be achieved. Water sustainability is not a zero sum game.

Environment Department Approval of Sandia Plan Violates Public Right of Review

Higher levels of Tritium and Solvents found in New Study at the Sandia Mixed Waste Landfill dump

By Dave McCoy

On December 22, 2008, the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) violated its own administrative order for citizen involvement for the Mixed Waste Landfill (MWL dump) at Sandia National Laboratories (Sandia) by approving a Corrective Measures Implementation Plan (CMI Plan).

This unpublicized approval of the CMI Plan allows Sandia to construct a dirt cover over the MWL dump and leave 700,000 + cubic feet of long-lived radioactive and hazardous waste in the MWL dump. The waste lies above Albuquerque's drinking water aquifer in unlined pits and trenches in an area where numerous other dumps, such as the Chemical Waste Landfill (CWL dump), have leaked toxic contaminants to the groundwater. During the period from 1999 to 2002, Sandia excavated the toxic wastes buried in the CWL dump.

The NMED approval of the CMI Plan is a violation of the 2005 Final Order of NMED Secretary Ron Curry that requires that the public shall be provided the opportunity for review and comment on such documents prior to their approval by the NMED.

For the past 2 years, Citizen Action has been trying to obtain a 2006 TechLaw report from the NMED about the release of toxic waste from the MWL dump. The TechLaw report was used to review the CMI Plan and was one of the reasons the NMED issued a notice of disapproval (NOD) for the plan in late 2006.

The NMED sued Citizen Action to keep the TechLaw report secret. The lawsuit was thrown out of court. The Court ruled the TechLaw report is a public record. NMED is now appealing the decision. Citizen Action still can't obtain the TechLaw report because an automatic stay is in place during the appeal.

The NMED NOD required a new study of the soil gas contamination beneath the MWL dump. Sandia performed the study and submitted a report of findings to NMED in August of 2008. The NMED approved the soil gas report on September 26, 2008 also without the required opportunity for public review and comment.

The CMI Plan has changed greatly from what was originally proposed to the public. These important changes were made through "private communications" between NMED and Sandia

that excluded the public. Among the changes are: different trigger levels for detecting contamination and sampling requirements that are not responsive to public concerns for early detection of contamination. The removal of Tritium as a contaminant to sample in the soil gas below the MWL dump is one example of not meeting public concern.

Using "personal communications" that the public could not see, NMED agreed with Sandia not to require further Tritium monitoring. All earlier studies identified Tritium as the primary contaminant being released from the MWL dump. Because of its short half-life, the Tritium contamination was expected to decrease by more than 50% in the new study. However, the opposite has occurred.

Geologist Robert Gilkeson states that "The data in the new Soil Gas Report show a huge increase in the Tritium contamination in the soil gas below the MWL dump. A major mistake is that the new study did not sample the known Tritium hot spots. However, the data show an accelerated release of Tritium from the unlined pits and trenches. The accelerated release increases the danger for Tritium to contaminate the groundwater below the

MWL dump. Quarterly monitoring of the soil gas below the dump is essential for early warning. The decision of the NMED to stop the soil gas sampling for Tritium is a mistake. Sampling the soil gas to depths of several hundred feet below the MWL dump for tritium and solvents is essential for early warning of groundwater contamination."

Gilkeson added that "The construction of the dirt cover will make it more difficult and very expensive to study the newly discovered releases of Tritium and Solvents from the dump. The dirt cover should not be installed until the danger of groundwater contamination is fully studied."

The 2008 sampling data are evidence of the new and increasing releases of Tritium and

Solvents (VOCs) from the unlined pits and trenches in MWL dump. The soil gas report was based on shallow sampling to only 50 feet at only three locations. The new study did not collect samples at the known Tritium hot spots that were identified in earlier studies.

Although it was one of the requirements for the new study, data comparison was not accomplished between the new soil gas study and the older study. No comparison of

the earlier data could be made with the sparse and insufficient data collected at different locations in the new study and with no concern to sample the known Tritium hot spots.

Groundwater monitoring wells for the MWL dump were recently required to be replaced due to the original wrong placement of the wells and well screens, corrosion of the screens and other problems that existed from the installation of the wells beginning in 1989. Insufficient data has been provided by the new monitoring wells to be able to conclude that there is no contamination to the groundwater beneath the MWL dump.

Numerous environmental organizations and individuals previously filed two complaint letters with the US Environmental Protection Agency Region 6 in late 2007 regarding NMED not allowing public participation at both Los Alamos National Laboratory and Sandia National Laboratories.

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Citizen Action is a project of the New Mexico Community Foundation.

CLAWBACK!

By Marvin Gladstone

"Have you no shame, sir?" was the rhetorical question addressed by Boston lawyer Joseph Welsh to Senator Joe McCarthy more than a half-century ago. The question (requiring no response in the context in which it was asked) effectively derailed the "Army-McCarthy Hearings" and took down the Wisconsin Senator.

"Have you no shame, sir?" might now be asked of the brokers and bankers complaining of the the half-million dollar salary cap imposed as the price of multi-billion dollar taxpayer bailouts of their

failed institutions.

"Have you no shame, sir, for taking down your brokerage and banking houses with bad investments, million dollar bonuses, luxury spas, etc., etc. - the list of transgressions now appearing endless?"

"Have you no shame, sir, for wiping out your investors while filling your pockets and contributing not ten cents worth of value to the economy, having created nothing but money-shifting self-enriching schemes?"

The spate of bad judgment calls by automobile barons flying from Detroit to D.C. one to a plane in

a fleet of private jets, their palms upturned, sank an industry which did, at least and however defectively, produce something of value. Bankers and brokers produce nothing, their equally-baneful activities limited to shifting whatever money manages to elude their seemingly-bottomless pockets. Who needs them?

The lame duck Republican administration (with, regrettably, the support of too many Democrats) gave Henry Paulson his initial \$350 billions of no-strings Wall Street bailout money. Paulson, in turn, dispensed the largesse without restraints, his beneficiaries quickly pocketing the booty, buying even more troubled competitors, handing out multi-million dollar bonuses and otherwise arrogating unto

themselves the right to grab the plunder for personal enrichment rather than its ostensibly-praiseworthy purpose. This looting of the public treasury totals, in all likelihood, scores of billions!

Can the billions thus diverted now be reclaimed? In bankruptcy such a reclamation process is called "clawback". But neither the prior nor the current administration, nor either the prior or the current Congress has - regrettably, in my view - chosen to utilize the bankruptcy process or the bankruptcy courts to control the bailouts.

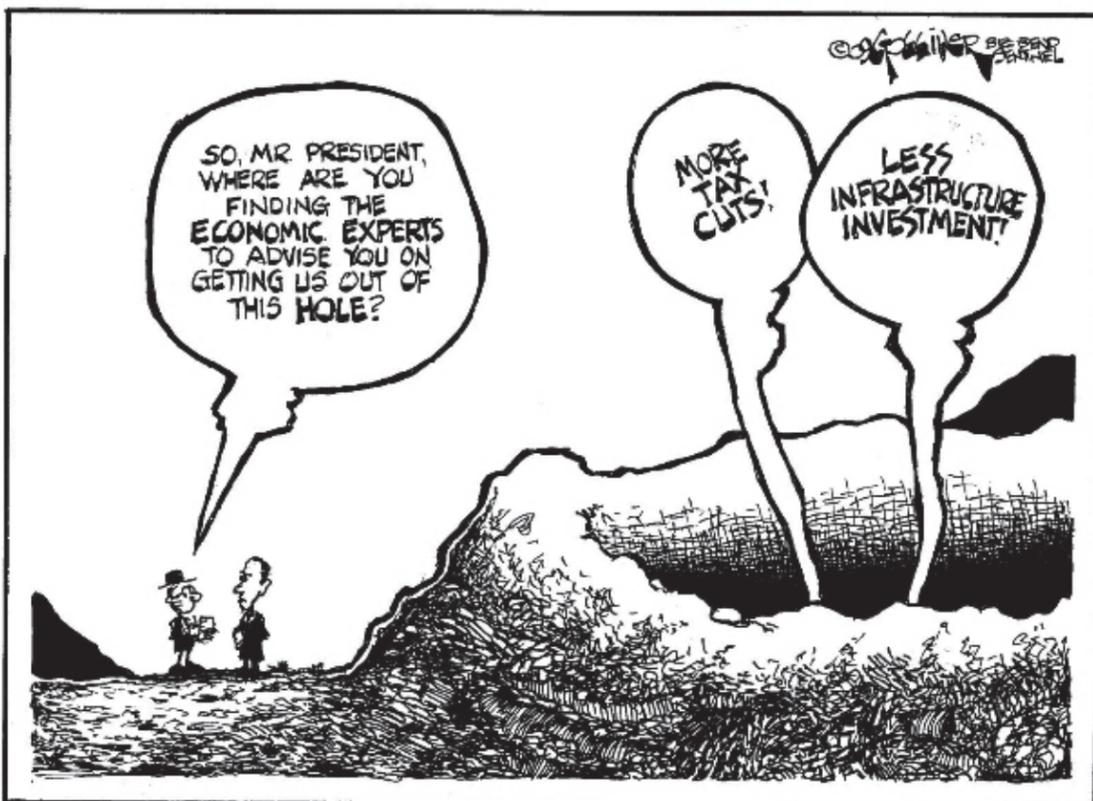
Failing any realistic federal recoupment effort, it will fall to the states whose citizens have been victimized, to right this wrong by legislation or by enforcement of existing statutes.

"No way!", cries the target of the disbursement, "I'm protected by Clause 1 of §10 of Article I of the United States Constitution!" That provision prohibits states from passing laws which impair "the Obligation of Contract" (first caps as originally drafted).

The clause by its terms does not apply to the federal government; its power to impair being nevertheless constrained by judicial importation of the private law "freedom of contract" concept into the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments' prohibitions against deprivations of liberty and property without due process of law. Those inhibitors are, in turn, mitigated by the Article 1 §8 empowerment of Congress to "establish... uniform laws on the subject of bankruptcies"; contract impairment being the very essence of bankruptcy administration. It is for this reason that federal bankruptcy, including its clawback opportunity, was and remains the preferable alternative.

The constraint of the "impairment clause" notwithstanding, absent meaningful federal "clawback" action, the several state legislatures whose citizens have been victimized, can act as a rational, reasonable and necessary exercise of their police powers, *i.e.*, protection of the public welfare. Thus, in *Home Building & Loan -vs- Blaisdell* (1934), the U.S. Supreme Court upheld a Minnesota statute extending the period for mortgage redemption on the rationale that "public needs" required that the "reservation of the reasonable exercise of the [state's] protective power [be] read into all contracts." And although the high court invalidated a state legislative abrogation of a covenant in a public bond issue, Justice Harry Blackmun, the opinion's author, was careful to note that contractual impairments might well be upheld "if they were reasonable and necessary to serve an important public purpose." *U.S. Trust -vs- New Jersey* (1977). And, more currently, Justice John Paul Stevens noted in *Keystone Bituminous Coal Association -vs- De-Benedictis* (1987) that "it is well settled that the prohibition against impairing the obligation of contract is not to be read literally."

Thus, while federal clawback efforts would likely be more effective than state legislation, the apparent reluctance of the Obama administration and the Congress to seek reparations suggests pursuit of state legislative remedies. Absent either federal or state clawback measures those to whom Teddy Roosevelt referred as "the malefactors of great wealth", will have gotten away with one of the greatest heists in the history of the human race.



COMMENTARY

Why Homeland Security is So Beloved

By Jim Hightower



Arizona Gov. Janet Napolitano is moving to Washington to become head of the Homeland Security Department in the Obama administration, and I sure hope she's bringing a load of two things this humongous agency totally lacks: common sense and common decency.

Homeland Security is in charge of building the ridiculous and absurdly expensive 40-foot-high wall that our government is erecting along the U.S. border with Mexico. The very idea of this divisive wall is offensive to the people who live in U.S. border towns, but the insufferable arrogance of the agency has made the wall's

offensiveness explosive.

The Department's charm was on glaring display just before Christmas, when it sued the Nature Conservancy to condemn land near Brownsville, Tex., for the project. The conservancy owns and runs a unique 1,000-acre preserve along the Rio Grande, and the federal wall builders wanted to take a 60-foot-wide strip from the preserve - amounting to about eight acres.

Why fuss over eight acres? Well, you'd assume that the wall would be going up on the actual border, but no. They want to build this section a mile-and-a-half from the border, thus putting three-fourths of the preserve in a no-man's land between the wall and Mexico. The most critical part of the wildlife habitat, and even the home of the preserve's manag-

er, would be cut off by the wall, effectively destroying the park, which is home to two kinds of endangered wildcats and a rare palm forest.

A decade ago, the conservancy paid \$2.6 million to buy this gem, yet Homeland Security now insists that it should pay only \$114,000 as "fair compensation" for the 60-foot stretch it intends to take from the center of the preserve. It's this kind of swaggering lunacy that has made the agency so beloved. Good luck to Janet Napolitano.

Former Texas Agriculture Commissioner, former Texas Observer editor, and spark-plug populist Jim Hightower is a best-selling author. To subscribe to his award-winning month by newsletter, The Hightower Lowdown, visit www.jimhightower.com

Local and Loco: A Wealth of Possibilities

By Astrid Webster

The dance between Local and Loco, to which this column is dedicated, is rife with potential, for good or ill, even nil, in this inaugural year. President Obama, fresh from surfing the wave of his promise for change through an uncommonly well executed campaign, was honored at jubilant victory celebrations. Throngs of war weary, fear and paranoia depleted citizens shed their gloom to welcome a man of promise.

Most of us were overjoyed to see Bush's regime fade, though stunned by the wreckage left in its wake. Relieved at yet another peaceful change of the guard, we were struck by the cracking and crumbling of financial empires as he passed, underlining once again the truth of Naomi Kline's book on economic theft and violence, *The Shock Doctrine*. Enormous shifts of money to the wealthy and privileged during times of uncertainty and trauma are benchmarks of a successful free market system. They herald a post-democratic, multi-tiered economy that rewards a very few at great expense to everyone and everything else.

Hasty bail outs, whether for overblown companies eviscerated by greedy management or giant manufacturers whose product lines offered us everything but a clean and sustainable future are simple theft. We can't wait for Mr. Obama's wit and wisdom to pull us out of embers that have been smoldering for most of our lives. The dream that promises a mansion at the end of every driveway and a world whose resources and marketplaces are ours to exploit is dying in the fields of Iraq as well as here.

America's experiment in self-governance, her citizens eager to live out the promise of democracy, however messy or challenging, has become a nightmare.

Human dignity and equality, after a broad stretch between 1960 and 1970, are again shrinking, with the poor, females and non-whites once again growing in vulnerability.

World War II, it seems, infused us with a confidence that changed our demeanor and what we saw as our business. Citizens, government and our manufacturing capacity were able to gear up to an extent that amazed everyone. America emerged a world leader, armed with a weapon that would virtually guarantee world supremacy as long as we could control access to materials and technology while quietly and (mostly) unobtrusively enabling our

military to reach around the world. Although America's hostile exchanges with other countries came and went, dedication to a growing military establishment never wavered. Nor did their loyalty to the weapon they shielded by claiming that it saved a million lives and ended WW II. Even when we thought we had a respite from conservatives who don't conserve and limited government proponents who carved up and served themselves large slices of the commons, our personal and public resources retreated into others' pockets. Former President Clinton, though a public Democrat, became a closet Republican. Many of us are still wary that a similar duplicity could infect our new administration. We tire of freedom speech yoked with an oppressive reality.

Just as there are many possible pitfalls, we have an abundance of wonderful possibilities. With the involution of material wealth, we have an opportunity to turn to the true lights of our lives, an incredibly beautiful, resource-rich nation, a people with a long history of picking themselves up after they fall, an historic resourcefulness and technical creativity with an undeniable legacy of lifting others up and extending our liberties and privileges to them.

Some have kept our eyes on the material wealth that this country has made possible. Others have held that civil rights, equal opportunity under the law, a free and appropriate education and a clean, healthful environment are at the core of an enduring nation. No country can travel down both roads. None can long survive our post 9-11 policies of subordinating everything and everyone to a quest for physical safety that jeopardizes everyone not in lock-step with building global empire.

Our enthusiastic support for President Obama's election is not guaranteed without his deep intention to keep campaign promises, including listening to people, having their well-being as his highest priority, reforming health care, ending exploitation of children and protecting our remaining resources by letting nuclear energy, coal and oil infrastructure fade as we downsize and conserve, investing, instead, in clean, locally based renewables.

We have to shed our niavete and demand an allegiance to truth. Clean coal, new and safe nuclear technology and oil rigs that don't pollute are pure fantasy at

See **WEALTH** on page 4

Who Needs Stimulation?

By Harry Willson

The words "stimulus package" are floating around in every so-called "developed country." "Stimulus" can mean different things: a sound, a smell, a light, a goad, a cattle prod. They don't mean any of that. They want to stimulate "the economy," that is, make money circulate. So they send money, give money, several billion here, several dozen billion there, several hundred billion somewhere else. They're doing it in the UK, Germany, China, and even here in the USA.

What is this? Give money? To whom? Who needs stimulation? The first attempt here to move the economy by giving away huge chunks of public money wasn't called "stimulation," but "bail-out." The Bank Bail-out 750 billion dollars to banks, that is, to bankers. The intent was to stimulate the flow of credit. We give the bankers money for them to lend to borrowers, who need it for assorted projects that would energize the economy. It didn't work. The bankers kept the money. They used the money to buy competitor banks, and to pay themselves obscene bonuses. The economy was not stimulated.

So, back to our question -- who needs stimulation? The following come to mind right away:

- persons who lost their pensions,
- persons who lost their jobs,
- persons who lost their homes,
- persons who moved back in with their parents,
- persons who live under the bridge,

sick persons who don't get health care.

Remember how we used to shake our heads when members of the richest 5% in the country quoted GNP [gross national product] and average income figures [they were up slightly], and then said that the economy was on a good foundation and that everything was wonderful? We knew it wasn't. The top 5% were doing well; the rest of us were not. There is hunger in America. There are homeless people in our town.

A little math could help us understand this. Note the difference between average income and median income. Take a pool of 100 people. 99 of them make \$100 a week. One makes \$10,100 a week. Average is the total divided by the number of persons.

$$\begin{aligned}
 99 \times \$100 &= \$9,900 \\
 1 \times \$10,100 &= \$10,100 \\
 \text{total} &= \$20,000 \\
 \text{average} &= \$2,000 \text{ per week!}
 \end{aligned}$$

But you and I, part of the herd, know we made half that. No one is doing well, except that one person. He's doing so well, he doubles the average.

Looking for "median income," the amount made by the guy in the middle, number 50, say, and it is still \$100.

In recent weeks the situation in the real world has become worse. GDP [gross domestic product] is dropping. Even the top 5% are losing. The bottom 95% have been losing for a long time. The whole world is in bad shape, some of it much worse than here. The history of how things got so bad is told in *THE SHOCK DOCTRINE*, by Naomi Klein. I

recommend every citizen read it, but I warn you, it is a different kind of stimulation. It made me furious, all over again.

A very serious danger, to everyone, is runaway inflation. Remember Germany, China, Argentina, Zimbabwe. Thank the Powers that Be, "It can't happen here!" "Pray that it not happen in winter."

So then, who needs stimulation? Free money, I mean. It begins to become obvious. Give money first to those who have no income. Then give some to those who have little income. Then to those who have little fixed income. At this point moralists will break in with, "But they didn't earn it!"

What? Do you think those in the top 5% earned it? The IRS even has a category, especially for them, called "unearned income." We're not trying to check on who earned what. We're trying to stimulate the economy. This is the "trickle up" theory of economics, and it would work, if we dared try it.

There is no need to stimulate those with huge incomes. What would they spend it on? What do they still need? They get salaries and bonuses in the hundreds of millions of dollars. What could they possibly still want? More! More, you say. More what? "More," by itself, isn't anything. More candy, more ice cream, more houses, more cars, more companies -- it is ridiculous and obscene.

We need to stimulate the bottom, not the top.

Check out Harry's library of old rants, and excerpts from his books, at www.ama-dorbooks.com



Publisher:
Friends of Albuquerque Tribune, Inc.
 a 501(C)3 non-profit organization
 P O Box 35058,
 Albuquerque, NM 87176-5058

The *ABQ TRIal Balloon* is online at www.ABQTRialBalloon.com. All material in this publication has been contributed by mostly local writers, photographers, and cartoonists. This issue is distributed by volunteers. Help by passing it along!

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Printed by Vanguard Printing, Inc. on 75% recycled paper and soy ink. Graphic design by Christine Carter

BOOK REVIEW

“Nixonland”

By Rick Perlstein

And film, “Frost/Nixon”

Directed by Ron Howard,

Reviewed by Jack Pickering

“Frost/Nixon” dramatizes the contrast between two types of consuming ambition. Nixon, nursing a poor boy’s grudge against the privileged, is a lifelong captive to “o’er-weening” ambition. Thus he is prepared to disgrace his country for his own satisfaction. Frost simply wants to be number one in his vocation of broadcast journalism. The self-promoting broadcaster’s “victory” over the political bully exemplifies capitalism at its best. (Never mind that the script arguably departs somewhat from actual events.)

Nixon was never a businessman, pitting his product or service against others in the marketplace. Nixon was a lifelong politician, selling only his

self-image. Unfortunately he did so unscrupulously. Growing up as an angry poor boy in rural California, he won scholarships to little Whittier College and new Duke Law School, mainly by his skill as a debater. Two Duke classmates had higher grades and went to Wall Street. Disappointed, he went to a Washington bureau. During World War II he served honorably but safely as a Naval administrative officer on a Pacific Island.

Postwar he was recruited as a GOP candidate by rich Southern Californians. He won a seat in the U.S. House and then in the Senate in utterly dishonest “Red”-smearing campaigns. Widespread American fear of Soviet “subversion” was Nixon’s key to political success. As a star of the House Un-American Affairs Committee, Nixon failed to prove the disloyalty of striped-pants diplomat Alger Hiss, but created an impression that the Ivy Leaguer was hiding something. That coup landed Nixon the job

of Eisenhower’s veep. After all, Hiss had been at Yalta, where Stalin supposedly duped an ailing FDR. Seemingly washed up in the Kennedy/LBJ era, Nixon was kept on the campaign trail by rich friends. Dissatisfaction with the military quagmire in Vietnam brought Nixon to the White House in 1969. He and top advisor Kissinger launched “carpet bombing” of Laos and Cambodia to cut off alleged support of Vietnamese “insurgents” (Kennedy administration’s term). When the insurgents were clearly winning in 1972, Nixon and Kissinger got the idea of establishing diplomatic relations with Red China. (Senator Joseph Clark, a Pennsylvania Democrat, had been hounded out of office in 1968, partly for advocating this idea.) Not content with an assured second victory in the 1972 Presidential race, Nixon cobbled together an amateurish anti-Democratic conspiracy. That brought him down in 1974, as he finally confessed to Frost.

Dick Gaughan Raises a Rebel Voice Against Lies of the Past

By Bill Nevins (New Mexico Irish American Society Member)

“Took old Geronimo by storm,
And they ripped all the feathers off
his uniform!”

Warden, warden, can’t you see?
Be kind and set Geronimo free!”

Dick Gaughan dedicates “Geronimo’s Cadillac” in performance to American prisoner Leonard Peltier. Like Pete Seeger or the late Utah Phillips, Scotland’s Dick Gaughan is an unrepentant rebel and clear-spoken bard of social justice. Gaughan’s straightforward delivery and musical mastery is in fine display on his 2008 album “Dick Gaughan—Live! From the Traders Club” (available as an import from amazon.com).

Interviewed during his last Albuquerque concert visit, Gaughan saw Native American struggle as linked to worldwide meddling by brutal outsiders-- a subject well-known to Scots. “We used to elect our king in Scotland, you know. The last one we elected was MacBeth,” Gaughan despises the inherited-monarchy system of the UK: “I think Mrs. Windsor [Queen Elizabeth] is probably a very nice, wealthy woman, but there’s few Scots want her telling us what to do in our own country,” he chuckles, affirming his own belief in Scottish Republicanism, and democratic rule.

Sprung from Highland Scots and Irish parents, Dick Gaughan is the established Bard of Edinburgh, a central figure in the 1970s Celtic folk revival with The Boys of the Lough and his early solo record, *Handful of Dust*, is an essential classic.

Gaughan snorts his distaste for weepy old songs about fallen aristocrats like Bonnie Prince Charlie: “Charles Edward Stuart was a bloody cretin! The man spent hardly two years of his whole life in Scotland--he was a terrible coward! Those damned songs were written a hundred years later by people who never knew him or what suffering he caused the Scots!” On his new *LIVE!* cd, Gaughan dismisses Bonnie Charlie via Brian MacNeill’s lyrics “There’s no gods and precious few

heroes, and those lies of the past are all they’ve ever been!”

Gaughan instead turns a clear eye on history and celebrates socialism in songs like “No Cause For Alarm”:

“They’re trying to say our time has passed,
Hell, it hasn’t even started!
They haven’t stopped us, and they never will!
Gonna run to the top of the nearest hill,
And dance ‘til the sun comes up!”

Gaughan cites the 1973 fascist murder of Chilean folk singer Victor Jara as galvanizing his own political commitment: “I knew then I couldn’t just play old tunes. People’s music, folk music, rock n roll if you will, is very dangerous stuff! It is subversive to acknowledge that ordinary people actually have a culture with artistic merit. This gives the lie to those who would like us to think that the poor are poor because they are stupid!”

Dick Gaughan’s in-your-face politics doubtless have caused his US visa problems--his last tour here was in 1996! (One Gaughan song asks, “What the hell would Abraham Lincoln say/If he could see America now?”)

And that’s our loss. One hopes that Dick Gaughan will get back to see us again, and, as he did on his last New Mexico visit, deliver his masterpiece, a meditative rendition of Hamish Henderson’s “51st Highland Division’s Farewell to Sicily,” (recorded on *SAIL ON*). An eerie World War II song about Scots troops about to embark on an uncertain mission, that



song resonates for our wary times.

Always wary of icons and symbols that can be misused, Gaughan clearly places his values in human contact and the worth of hard work and united struggle for justice. “I tend to side with people like the Diggers, those English revolutionaries who fought without weapons for a fair share of the land that rightfully was the property of everyone to begin with,” says Gaughan, summing up his philosophy, and smiling.

“Ye rich take warning,
Ye poor take care,
This earth was made a common
treasury for everyone to share!
Ye Diggers all stand up for Glory,
stand up now!”
 (“World Turned Upside Down,” - Leon Rosselson)

Dick Gaughan’s website is dick-gaughan.co.uk. Dick Gaughan’s cds include *Sail On* and *Redwood Cathedral*, available from *Appleseed Records* appleseedrec.com

Full Speed Ahead for IRV & Choice Voting in Minneapolis

A county judge in Minnesota has sided on every legal issue with the city of Minneapolis and defendant intervenor FairVote Minnesota in a challenge against Minneapolis implementing instant runoff voting and choice voting for its elections this November. The ruling is a sweeping victory for advocates of IRV and proportional voting in Minneapolis. With a 65% mandate from voters in a 2006 measure, the city will move forward on implementing these systems for November 2009.

The ruling comes in the midst of major interest in instant runoff voting in Minnesota in the wake of the controversial U.S. Senate recount. The Washington Post cited it in an editorial on Jan. 13, while several leading Minnesotans have embraced IRV for statewide elections.

Bills promoting instant runoff voting are advancing in several states, and Burlington, Vermont is gearing up for a hotly-contested, five-candidate race for mayor this March in its second instant runoff voting election.

FairVote Minnesota - <http://www.fairvotemn.org>

WEALTH from page 3

this time. Part of the truth is revealed in a commercial recently aired by Shell Oil’s CEO in which he congratulates Mr. Obama, praising his efforts in the direction of renewable energy. Now, he adds sternly, remember that 90% of our current energy comes from coal, oil and nuclear, whose infrastructure is aging fast and in need of [could it be coincidence, 90% of the] money allocated for energy so we can build shiny new sources of earth toxins.

No amount of bail-out money will do us any good if we keep doing the same stupid things that got us into this mess. If anything should be bailed out, it would be small, local business, family farms, locally produced organics, solar, wind and geothermal energy, the Kyoto Accords and the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty with zero tolerance for the building of any nuclear weapons or infrastructure for any purpose other than cleaning up disgraceful waste. Coal, oil and nuclear, contrary to the dreams of Shell and other mega-profit companies, stand between us and the promise of America as well as Mr. Obama’s promises. Enabling and perpetuating military aggression and dominance over those who do not seek endless influence and material wealth, they are the dinosaurs of technology and should remain in the depths.

We must be clear in our expectations and unrelenting in our demands. We did not elect new leaders to maintain the status quo. Greg Mortenson, who has made friends for us by building schools in Pakistan and Afghanistan, offers wise foreign policy counsel in his best selling *Three Cups of Tea* when he quotes Brigadier General Bashir Baz: “People like me are America’s best friends in the region.... I’m a moderate Muslim, an educated man. But watching this [images of the US war on Iraq], even I could become a jihadi. How can Americans say they are making themselves safer?... Your President Bush has done a wonderful job of uniting one billion Muslims against America for the next two hundred years.”

Mortenson’s mission rests on believing he can change an important piece of the world by educating young women and counts former members of the Taliban among his teachers. Even as FDR, who took office under conditions akin to those facing us now, agreed with calls for strident economic rewards, still insisted, “make me.” Taos economist, Erich Kuerchner believes it was Eleanor who harnessed

Franklin’s resolve and sees that same spark in Michelle, the nation’s First Mom.

I think I see that too. Motherhood is a powerful incentive for wisdom. No nation long survives without a deep and abiding love for the next generation, and the next....

Our nation cannot wait for someone, anyone to do the right thing. Democracy depends on the majority of us doing the right thing, now: bold, highly public discourse about changing the way we live, produce, consume and use our resources, especially energy. No more quick and dirty fixes for an energy grid that will soon leave us in the cold and dark, with nothing left for generations to come.

The Three-Legged Stool: Connecting The Dots Out West

By JW Madison, Rails Inc

After the September 11 attacks, a Rail advocate told Congress that a good national transportation system should be like a "Three-legged stool", with Road, Rail and Air being the legs. He stated, and we agree, that one of the legs is missing (or is just a stump). We Americans abandoned Rail as our primary passenger-carrying "mode" less than 60 years ago, and we're already in serious trouble as a result.

Rail is safe. Rail is remarkably efficient in land, fuel, materials and maintenance. Rail is environmentally friendly. Rail promotes renewable energy and reinvestment in our city centers and first-ring suburbs. Rail is a natural partner to walking and biking. And people just plain like trains. And with high gas prices (they'll be back up soon enough) and our considerable air-travel headaches, people are liking them more and more. Look at Amtrak's record-setting ridership numbers.

Freight Rail is doing well and local and / or regional passenger Rail is coming back all over America (even here). But nationally, all we have is Amtrak, and it's not nearly big enough.

The history of Amtrak includes periods of ignorant and top-heavy management, but that's not their big problem. In fact, most discussion of how Amtrak is (or is not) run is a big fat red herring. Amtrak labors under three major burdens:

- 1) Chronic under-funding, deliberately designed to keep it underfed;
- 2) Track sharing with the freight railroads, who claim priority in scheduling; and
- 3) The breathtakingly wrong notion that passenger Rail should "pay for itself", a notion NOT applied to other modes of transportation (see Transportation Subsidies: Who's Really On Welfare?, ABQ Trial Balloon, June 2008).

Despite these serious problems, and in anticipation of possible future improvements in Congress's attitude toward national Rail, we want to see Amtrak expanded; not just maintained at its present half-starvation level. A good place to start this expansion is right here in the American West:

FILLING IN THE BLANKS

If you compare a map of the Interstate Highway system with one of Amtrak, you'll see that if the former was anything like the latter, we'd be missing, among other routes, all of I-25. These gaps need closing, the sooner the better; therefore:

Rails Inc is calling for the establishment of daily Amtrak Superliner service from El Paso, Texas to Shelby, Montana; via Albuquerque, Denver and Cheyenne (see map). We're calling this service The "Rocky Mountain Flyer" (RMF). Since significant obstacles exist along portions of our proposed route, making this train happen will require a united effort on the part of the Governors, Departments Of Transportation (DOT's), federal and state legislators, freight railroads and advocacy groups in the five states along the route, coupled with an exciting and thorough public information campaign.

Why? Because modern Rail---any kind, anywhere--- offers a breathtaking number of benefits, a few of which are listed above. Besides these, the RMF would link together Amtrak's four principal Western routes: the Sunset Limited, the Southwest Chief, the Zephyr and the Empire Builder; plus the cities and highways along the RMF's route.

Some of Amtrak's most successful routes are those sponsored and funded by one or more states. Further, as implied above, we think Amtrak could do a fine job if they ever once got the money to do it right. The rolling stock sitting around awaiting repair and rehab in their holding yards would more than enable what we propose, with enough left over to improve other routes. The success of Amtrak California is one among several examples of how a State government can work with Amtrak to restore idle equipment

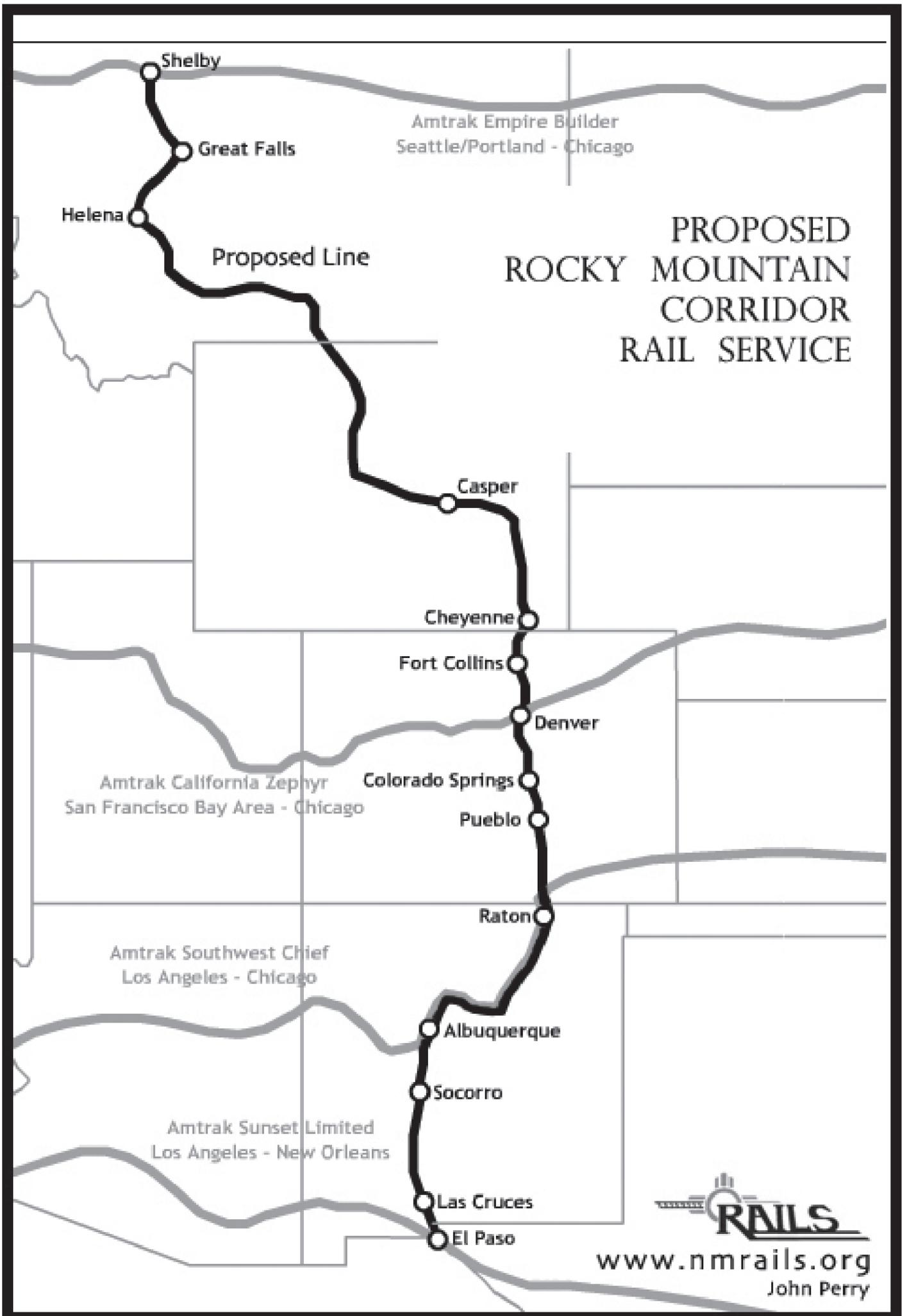
to revenue service.

The recently signed legislation authorizing an increase in Amtrak funding (!) is only a beginning. Congress has yet to appropriate the money. Perhaps this development, along with the proposed "stimulus package", could work in harness with our "RMF" proposal to create some momentum toward the complete passenger Rail network our country so badly needs.

We believe that any political leader who sticks his / her neck out for more and better passenger Rail will find said neck pretty safe after all; not from the flat-earth special interests, but from the general voting public.

Passenger Rail is one of the few products and services in America in which Supply is cynically restricted in the face of great and increasing Demand. Some Free Market. Our people want more trains. Let's supply them.

Rails Inc can be reached at: rails@nm-rails.org.



Rio Grande Valley Farmers Guild

By John Shipley

The Rio Grande Valley Farmers Guild, the farmer-owned, farmer-operated coop formed during the past year has continued with the creating of its corporate obligations by writing by-laws to govern the work of the Guild, and writing a business plan to encompass the scope of its work.

The most recent efforts have resulted in the creation of a demonstration plot of twelve acres in the North Valley on land managed by the Rio Grande Community Farms. In addition to providing an opportunity to grow cereal grains where they can be viewed by the public the effort will allow for the development of farming techniques designed to increase productivity while protecting the soil and water from deterioration. The crops selected for the demonstration plot include Hopi blue corn, barley and spring wheat. First planting of wheat and barley will be on or about April 1 with planting date for the Hopi blue corn to be on or about May 10.

As a part of this and other collaborative efforts the Guild is developing an equipment sharing program. This will allow for more comprehensive farming without unnecessary capital outlay for equipment by either of the participating groups. Training in the use of the equipment and/or utilization of "authorized operators" will ensure care of the equipment and full utilization of existing equipment inventories.

Present efforts include development of marketing opportunities. One area of emphasis is the growing of hops and barley for use by local breweries. Efforts to brew non-traditional beers from wheat, corn and quinoa are also a part of this effort. The establishment of a local facility for "malting" barley is being investigated and planned. This will allow for full utilization of locally grown grains in this market.

Future efforts will include other value-added products to be produced from the array of grain to be grown. It will include such items as cereals for breakfast and other meals, flours, meals and



specialty products such as high-protein energy snacks for marketing to schools, all produced from local products.

Membership in the Guild is now being addressed and when

completed, will allow consumers to become members and avail themselves of the benefits of membership and support the goals of the Guild in strengthening our local agricultural economy.

John Shipley is the Executive Director of the Rio Grande Valley Farmers Guild, 2108 Telesfor, SW, Albuquerque, NM 87105; 505-873-8689

Vilsack Could Learn From Henry Wallace

By Jim Harkness

Barack Obama's selection as Secretary of Agriculture, former Iowa Gov. Tom Vilsack, has some big shoes to fill. The last Iowan to serve as head of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Henry Wallace, was by far the greatest Secretary of Agriculture in our nation's history. Serving under FDR during the Great Depression, Wallace made sweeping reforms that saved farmers from the Dust Bowl and ushered in the most prosperous period in rural America's history. Like Wallace, Governor Vilsack will enter office as part of an administration swept into power with a strong mandate for change during a major economic crisis. Vilsack would do well to pause and consider how his illustrious predecessor from Iowa might handle our current predicament.

In 1933, Wallace was confronted with a farm economy that had boomed and then busted. Overproduction had led to a price crash, and the combination of environmentally harmful farming practices and drought had created the Dust Bowl. Wallace understood that to turn things around, he needed to control the volatility of markets and to change the way people farmed. Through the Commodity Credit Corporation and other New Deal farm programs, the government allowed farmers to store their crops in a reserve when prices were low, and the stored crops were then sold when prices rose too high.

This guaranteed fair markets for producers and a more stable food supply for the nation. Amazingly, these programs actually cost taxpayers very little, and even

made money in some years. And through the Soil Conservation Acts of 1935 and 1936, the USDA rewarded farmers for setting aside highly eroded land or switching from soil-depleting crops to soil-restoring grasses and legumes. Expenditures for Wallace's conservation programs, adjusted for inflation, were actually higher than several recent Farm Bills. Wallace understood that when agricultural markets fail, the government has a duty to protect farmers, the environment and our food security.

The predicament facing Governor Vilsack is really not so different from 1932. The symptoms may seem new: climate change, global food shortages, biofuels, food safety scares. But the central challenges once again are markets run amok and the unsustainable farming practices they promote. Decades of free market fundamentalism and agribusiness lobbying have gutted Wallace's programs or twisted them beyond recognition. Farmers and consumers are back on the boom and bust rollercoaster. Over the last year, many consumers experienced sticker shock in grocery aisles as food prices shot up. Now, agriculture commodity prices have plunged again, leaving many farmers to sell their products for less than it cost to grow them and to depend on government payments to get by.

Today, the real winners in the system are a tiny handful of agribusiness companies, who profit from the boom bust cycle and whose anti-competitive control of the market hurts farmers and consumers alike. The tremendous concentration of land and economic power in the food system today is much greater than in Wallace's time. And instead of a Dust Bowl

concentrated in the Great Plains, we have an entire agriculture system that is toxic. It runs from the poisonous chemicals used to grow crops, to the unhealthy foods marketed to our children contributing to the obesity crisis, to the enormous dead zone choking the Gulf of Mexico, to the massive emissions of greenhouse gases from industrial farming.

Faced with such an array of problems, the temptation may be to tinker at the margins; to curb some of the most egregious abuses and try to get a few more dollars for climate-friendly agriculture and organic farming programs. Of course, this is needed. But to make the larger changes that are necessary, we need more than tinkering.

We must directly take on price volatility and uncompetitive markets in agriculture – not just mitigate the effects. And we must transition to a more environmentally-sustainable farming system. And like Wallace, we must recognize that the chaos in agriculture markets and our environmental goals are linked and must be tackled together, not separately.

Let's hope Agriculture Secretary Vilsack has the vision of Henry Wallace, to see that the current crisis brings with it both the opportunity and the necessity to help rebuild the nation from the soil up.

Jim Harkness is president of the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy. (www.iatp.org) The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, headquartered in Minneapolis, is a policy research center committed to creating environmentally and economically sustainable rural communities and regions through sound agriculture and trade policy. Distributed by Minutemanmedia.org.

Mercury Found In Nearly Half of All Corn Syrup

In a new study published Monday in the scientific journal *Environmental Health*, mercury was found in nearly 50 percent of tested samples of commercial high fructose corn syrup. The news is disturbing given that this ingredient is present in a large portion of processed American foods. According to David Wallinga, M.D., co-author of the study, "Given how much high fructose corn syrup is consumed by children, it could be a significant additional source of mercury never before considered. We are calling for immediate changes by industry and the FDA to help stop this avoidable mercury contamination

of the food supply." A separate study by the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy detected mercury in nearly one-third of 55 popular brand-name food and beverage products where high fructose corn syrup is the first or second highest labeled ingredient-including products by Quaker, Hershey's, Kraft and Smucker's.

Reprinted from Organic Bytes

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New Farmers Wanted

The average age of the American farmer is nearing 60. The nation needs more young farmers.

The newsletter of the National Sustainable Agricultural Information Service, a project of the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT) is one resources among many to help beginning farmers find a farm and learn to effectively run it.

To order a free copy of the newsletter (www.attra.ncat.org) - 1 (800) 346-9140



March on the Pentagon

On the 6th Anniversary of the Iraq War

More than 1,000 organizations and individuals have now endorsed the March 21, 2009, March on the Pentagon to say "Bring the Troops Home NOW!" on the sixth anniversary of the criminal invasion of Iraq.

The ANSWER Coalition is joining with other coalitions, organizations, and networks in a March 21 National Coalition to bring people from all walks of life and from all cities across the United States to take part in a March on the Pentagon on the sixth anniversary of the Iraq war: Saturday, March 21.

In Albuquerque, a coalition of organizations is planning with Stop the War Machine for a large demonstration of solidarity with the National Coalition. The event will be 11 a.m. - 1 p.m. at the Galeria Plaza, (corner of 2nd and Copper), in Albuquerque. Stop the War Machine can be reached at stopthewarmachine@comcast.net or call 401-4808.

The thousands who march will demand "From Iraq to Afghanistan to Palestine, Occupation is a Crime" and "We Need Jobs and Education, Not Wars and Occupation." They will insist on

an end to the war threats and economic sanctions against Iran. They will say no to the illegal U.S. program of detention and torture.

While millions of families are losing their homes, jobs and healthcare, the real military budget next year will top one trillion dollars--that's \$1,000,000,000,000. If used to meet people's needs, that amount could create 10 million new jobs at \$60,000 per year, provide healthcare for everyone who does not have it now, rebuild New Orleans, and repair much of the damage done in Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine. The cost for the occupation of Iraq alone is \$400 million each day, or about \$12 billion each month.

The war in Iraq has killed, wounded or displaced nearly one third of Iraq's 26 million people. Thousands of U.S. soldiers have been killed, and hundreds of thousands more have suffered severe physical and psychological wounds. The U.S. leaders who have initiated and conducted this criminal war should be tried and jailed for war crimes.

The war in Afghanistan is expanding. Robert Gates, Bush's defense secretary, who was kept at

his post by President Obama, has announced that the troop levels in Afghanistan may double in the coming months. Both he and Vice President Biden predicted higher casualties--or what they cavalierly call "an uptick" in casualties--in the coming period.

We must also act to end U.S. support for Israel's on-going war against the Palestinian people. The Bush Administration also gave the green light and provided the weapons and the money for Israel's recent war against the Palestinian people in Gaza. More than 5,000 Palestinians were killed or wounded; the majority of casualties were civilians, including hundreds of children, in this high tech massacre. And "We the People" paid the bill, as the U.S. provides \$2.5 billion a year for Israel's massive military machine.

The March 21, 2009, March on the Pentagon will be a critical opportunity to let the new administration in Washington hear the voice of the people demanding an immediate end to wars and occupation, and demanding economic justice. Joint actions will take place on the West Coast in San Francisco and Los Angeles.

Our Kids as Mercenaries

By William A. Collins

When recruitment's,
In the dumps;
Pay our kids,
To take their lumps.

The Pentagon doesn't talk much about it, but over half of America's presence in Iraq today is made up of mercenaries. That's how we keep down the number of actual troops. We now hire civilians to do for the soldiers many of the things they used to do for themselves. Everyone knows about Halliburton and Blackwater, and many have heard tell of scores of other companies that, at exorbitant rates, feed, house and supply our fighting men and women. There is even occasional note of the regiments of Bangladeshis slipped in to do the army's scut work.

But what about our heroic troops themselves? Surely, THEY'RE not in it for the money. Surely, they're not abandoned at the end of their tours like so many paid contractors. Surely, we nurture them for the rest of their lives like the heroes that they are. Sure.

I recently found a National Guard recruiting flier taped to a utility pole. It touted, "100% Tuition Free College," "Up to \$20,000 Enlistment Bonus," and "\$200/month of school G.I. Bill Kicker." Along the bottom were the usual tear-off strips with the recruiting sergeant's phone number, reiterating the \$20,000 bonus. Forget "Uncle Sam Needs You!" At our annual local Oyster Festival, the Guard augments these enticements with T-shirts, caps, push-up contests, vehicle displays and a party atmosphere. No amputees on hand.

For 18-year-olds with no career focus, all this hype can convey much allure. Smartly paid ex-generals flood the airways intoning about duty, service, foreign evils, and victory. Meanwhile war skep-

tics and recorders of suffering, such as Iraq Veterans Against the War, are systematically excluded from mainstream programming. Thus despite the well-known harsh realities of warfare and occupation, other realities like money, recession and propaganda help to keep filling our relentless recruiting quotas.

They also help to fill our Veterans Administration hospitals. Though even at that, painfully large squadrons of vets have yet to find solace with the VA. Especially those with emotional distress. Suicides among soldiers and returnees have now exceeded battle deaths in Iraq, and stress disorders plague combatants and veterans alike in disturbing numbers. The Defense Department also admits, though it does not advertise, that an astonishing 25,000 of its members have deserted, many heading for Canada and the rest playing hide-and-seek here at home.

But the largest body of troops just do their job and do eventually come home. Then they enter on a prolonged struggle to find a job, to reintegrate with their family, to increase their education, and to plead for government help with their mental and physical wounds. Unfortunately, there are still no good numbers for casualties from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or on its destructive effect on home or work. Mostly it simply goes untreated. As does the recently recognized Gulf War Syndrome from our battles in Kuwait.

So too do other veterans' afflictions. Housing shortages and homelessness weigh heavily on former soldiers. Likewise the lack of rape treatment and counseling, or even any government admission that rape is a common military occurrence. And despite congressional inquiries and diligent investigative reporting, care for veterans remains spotty and unreliable. The White House and Pentagon hush it up, fearful that the

truth might sour recruitment enthusiasm.

This unfortunately makes the whole war enterprise sound more and more like a mercenary world, which it is. Spend plenty of money on the front end with bonuses and improved salaries; scrimp on the back end when our warriors, patriots and heroes finally come home. That's when they learn how expendable they are.

And as a finishing touch of "fight for pay," Congress has now voted to speed up citizenship applications for those aliens who enlist. Offering such a lure to foreigners makes plain just where the United States plans to find the cannon fodder for its military adventures of the future.

Columnist William A. Collins is a former state representative and a former mayor of Norwalk, Connecticut.

MOM 2 MOM

I think if First Mom were in charge of bailing out anyone's bloody arse, she'd say:

To the greedmeisters on Wall Street:
If you spent your allowance on shaking down other kids for their lunch money, you'll get no more allowance until you've learned to respect others.

To the thoughtless boys in Detroit:
If you blew your wad building Hummers and Cadillac Escalades, you'll get no more allowance until you learn the lessons of the Honda Insight, the Ford Escort and come up with a sun-powered, plug-in WVO bio-diesel hybrid.

To the bad boys in coal, oil and nuclear:
There will be no more toys until you have learned to take care of the ones you already have. You're confined to your room until it is completely cleaned up and you stop trying to take things that don't belong to you.

Mark Your Calendars!

The Albuquerque Center for Peace and Justice is hosting a peace and justice weekend: be part of the solution, on April 17th and 18th, 2009. This exciting extravaganza will include a talk by Derrick Jensen at the South Broadway Cultural Center (SBCC) on Friday the 17th at 7pm, free creative arts workshops on Saturday the 18th at 1pm (location to be determined), and a poetry reading that night at 7pm at SBCC. Tickets for the Friday and Saturday events are only \$5. No one will be turned away for lack of funds. For questions about these events, or to help out, call the center at 268-9557.

The Peace Center is thrilled to bring Derrick Jensen to Albuquerque. Jensen is the acclaimed author of thirteen books, including *A Language Older Than Words*, *The Culture of Make Believe*, and *Endgame*. Author, teacher, activist, small farmer, and leading voice of uncompromising dissent, he has been hailed as the philosopher poet of the environmental movement.

Writes Publishers Weekly, "Jensen paints on a huge canvas an emotionally compelling and devastating critique of the intellectual, psychological, emotional and social structure of Western culture."

His premise is as profound as it is persistent: industrial civilization is inherently unsustainable. It will always require violence to biotic and human communities. And it will create a culture where trauma is normalized, where living beings become objects, and where the only relationship left is one of domination.

Jensen weaves together history, philosophy, environmentalism, economics, literature and psychology to produce a powerful argument and a passionate call for action. He guides us toward concrete solutions by focusing on our most primal human desire: to live on a healthy earth overflowing with uncut forests, clean rivers, and thriving oceans that are not under the constant threat of being de-

stroyed.

Jensen's writing has been described as "breaking and mending the reader's heart" (*Publishers Weekly*). He writes for *The New York Times Magazine*, *Audubon*, and *The Sun Magazine*, among many others. He holds a degree in creative writing from Eastern Washington University, a degree in mineral engineering physics from the Colorado School of Mines, and has taught at Eastern Washington University and Pelican Bay State Prison. He has packed university auditoriums, conferences, and bookstores across the nation, stirring them with revolutionary spirit. **Please join us on Friday, April 17th to welcome Derrick Jensen to Albuquerque and hear him speak.**

Call for Proposals

The Albuquerque Center for Peace and Justice will be hosting a Peace and Justice Weekend on April 17th & 18th.

As part of the festivities, we will be holding free workshops in the creative arts on Saturday, April 18 from 1 - 4:30pm. The theme of the afternoon is *exploring the connections between art and social justice*. How can your creative voice work toward solutions? We would like to offer workshops in the following areas: storytelling, creative writing/prose, performance art, and poetry. We are looking for artists to volunteer to lead the hour-long workshops. There will be an optional 5 minutes to present/share the essence of your workshop at the close of the afternoon. Please submit your proposal, including workshop details and target audience, by February 15. Email mail@abqpeaceandjustice.org (please write *creativity* in subject line), or bring a hard copy to the Peace Center. Questions? Call Mary at 268-9557. We look forward to reading your ideas!

Okinawans Visit Albuquerque

By Katherine Augustine, Laguna Pueblo

Okinawan dances were performed at the Highland Senior Center on January 22nd, in an early celebration of the Chinese New Year. Tables set with red tablecloths and Chinese lanterns honored The Year of the Ox. Dancers from the Miyagi Rhu Noshu Kai School of Okinawan Dance entertained an audience of seniors.

A young man's dance called Iwai Daiko was done to the beat of a drum. Then four women

in large green and red hats and orange kimonos performed the Udui Kuwadisa, a classical dance with castanets. Takadera Manzai featured a single male dancer portraying a stalker searching for his father's enemy; changing his facemasks, he told the story to music. The final dance, Shoshun No Mai by four women, was a dedication to Spring. The women danced with large pink plum blossoms in their hands.

Albuquerque's seven Senior Centers often entertain international guests as well as Pueblo, Navajo, and Apache performers.

A New Mexico Boondoggle: TIDDs - Tax Increment Development Districts

Late in the legislative session back in 2006, an obscure little bill won passage without much attention. The state statute allowing the creation of tax increment development districts, or "TIDD's"—and the subsequent handing over of millions upon millions of taxpayer dollars to private developers—literally passed in the dead of the night.

Tax increment financing is actually a simple concept. Imagine a circle drawn around a given geographic area. The tax district is created and at that time the current tax base is measured. Then, the developer of a project on that land is promised a percentage of the increase in taxes over that tax base in the future—for a period of up to 25 years. The premise is that the development is going to spur desirable growth in that area.

But New Mexico has taken this concept to a whole new, entirely undesirable level by allowing TIDDs to capture up to 75 percent of the state's future gross receipts tax in a given area—rather than just the municipal or county tax revenue. And, TIDDs are allowed for use on undeveloped land rather than restricting them to areas within a town or city that might legitimately need redevelopment.

This makes sprawl more likely because local elected officials will want to create as many TIDDs as they can since the great majority of future tax revenue invested in that tax district will come from the state. It's basically free money.

And this is exactly what has happened. Forest City Covington is developing Mesa del Sol on 12,000 acres on Albuquerque's southern

edge with the use of TIDDs. It's the largest such project in the nation so far when it comes to the use of tax increment financing. But it may ultimately be dwarfed by the plans of SunCal Corporation—one of the largest real estate developers in the nation. SunCal has hired teams of high-priced lobbyists to convince New Mexico's elected officials to create TIDDs for their 55,000 acres on Albuquerque's west side. Both of these companies are advocating for TIDDs in stages, but have plans to develop all of their land. At full build-out, SunCal would be basically creating another city right next door to Albuquerque.

In a nutshell, New Mexico is now in the business of padding the private wallets of quite profitable, extremely large out-of-state real estate developers. It's at the ex-

pense of the rural and small towns across the state that depend on the general fund for services, and it's to the detriment of urban communities like Albuquerque that need development within the urban core rather than polluting, car-dependent sprawl.

And it's all entirely unnecessary. Because such development on the fringe would not only happen anyway—but our planning agencies can insist that it happen in the proper way without the need for tax subsidies.

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Tell your legislator to reform the state TIDD statute. We need more accountability and requirements built into these agreements, and TIDDs should not be allowed for new developments on the urban fringe.

To find and communicate with your legislator, go to the website of the New Mexico legislature: www.nmlegis.gov. Or call SWOP at 505.247.8832.

Protecting Our Tax Base: New Mexicans Deserve it

New Mexico is beginning 2009 on the brink of an economic crisis, with increasing unemployment and a looming state budget shortfall that some say could be as high as \$450 million during the coming year. At the same time, we already have a seriously underfunded educational system and many New Mexicans without health care. We have some hard choices to make about how we use our tax dollars.

Times like these require us to stay engaged and hold our legislators accountable to their campaign promises, to guard against proposals that may seem like easy fixes but ultimately aren't the solution to our economic problems.

We need to protect our tax base and push for real reforms—such as universal health care—that will alleviate economic hardships for working families and ultimately increase the standard of living for the most vulnerable in our state.

As many realize, New Mexico has a lot of poverty—we're ranked 48th in the nation in this regard. To get a sense of what this actually means, let's take a look at figures from the 2008 New Mexico Poverty Reduction Task Force report:

18.5 percent of the state's population lives at or below the poverty line, which is \$17,600 for a family of three, or \$1,767 a month. When you break out children, this group holds 26 percent of the state's children. That's over a quarter of the state's children living in poverty.

Going deeper, 7.8 percent of New Mexicans live in severe poverty, a group that includes 11 percent of the states children. Severe poverty is defined as a family of three living with an annual income of \$8,800 or \$733 monthly.

The poor are also disproportionately from communities of color, illustrated by those counties considered to have "persistent poverty," a term used to describe counties in which more than 20 percent of the population is poor.

Ten of the twelve persistent poverty counties in New Mexico are home to either a 50 percent or

higher Chicano population, or have a Native American population of at least 40 percent.

Additionally, poverty has a rural flavor. Of those 12 counties, six have seen increased poverty since 1990, and six have seen a decline. Of the six with increased poverty, four are rural.

To sum up, the task force report said, "...poverty in New Mexico is severe, particularly in rural areas and in counties with high Hispanic and/or Native American populations. While the state has experienced some positive trends regarding poverty over the past ten years, we continue to rank among the worst in the nation."

Growth in New Mexico is not benefiting the poor

New Mexico has the 6th largest income inequality in the nation, and its growing. In real numbers, that's a difference between \$118,608 on average per family in the top income bracket and \$14,798 on average in the bottom.

In the late 1990s the top income earners made 6.3 times more than the lowest income earners made on average. Today, that 6.3 has climbed, with top income earners making 8 times more on average than those in the bottom income bracket.

In New Mexico, the top income brackets have done very, very well over the past decade—their income has increased by 30 percent, the highest increase in the nation.

While the middle income brackets haven't seen anywhere near that kind of growth, they did do ok, with a 7 percent increase in average income over the past decade.

But what about the lower income brackets? How have the poor in the state done? Not well at all. Families in the lowest income bracket saw average income growth of only 1.3 percent over the same decade.

These numbers demonstrate that growth in New Mexico is not benefiting the poor. And when you think about the rural nature of poverty and the growing inequality over the past decade, it's clear that those living in the state's ur-

ban centers are benefiting the most from the state's economic development efforts.

Protecting our state's tax base is important

Wading through all of these figures, a picture begins to emerge that demonstrates why our state's tax base is so important. It's the state's general fund that provides crucial services—like health care and education—to huge numbers of families with children who live in poverty.

In order to ensure that we are able to take care of our most vulnerable populations and at the same time devise strategies to decrease poverty in the state, we need to do two essential things:

Protect our existing tax base.

We can do this by setting a very high bar for the giving out of tax breaks and tax subsidies, such as those given through Tax Increment Development Districts (TIDDs). One thing we need to do is reform the state statute that enables TIDDs—to tighten the eligibility for them and to provide greater oversight during the life of the TIDD so that our general fund is not depleted in the future.

Ensure that we collect tax revenue in a way that is fair to all the residents of the state.

One way we can do this is by closing corporate tax loopholes that currently exist. One proposal is to pass a Mandatory Combined Reporting law that would require multi-state corporations to pay taxes on the income they make in New Mexico, rather than shift that income to other branches of their company outside the state for tax purposes. We should also revisit our personal income tax structure and raise the top income tax rates back to their 2002 levels.

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Citizens Petition Legislature and Governor to Bring New Mexico National Guard Home from Iraq

Representative Begaye and Senator Cisneros will soon be introducing a Joint Memorial to urge the Governor to bring the NM National Guard home from Iraq and refuse federalization of further 2009 deployments. This is on the basis that the AUMF (Authorization for Military Force) passed by Congress in 2003 no longer applies and is defunct.

Signatures have been sent to Governor Richardson on this for the past year and a half.

Signatures now number over 1000 New Mexican citizens. We are gathering a coalition of groups statewide to offer support for this bill. There are currently 14 states with legislative sponsors and campaigns on this issue (NM, VT, MA, NY, NJ, MD, WI, OR, PA, ME, NH, RI, MN, AK), 7 states with potential sponsors (CA, TN, MS, MT, CT, OH, MI), and 11 other states targeted for outreach. Participat-

ing national organizations: After Downing Street.org, Cities for Peace, CODEPINK, Courage to Resist, Iraq Veterans Against the War, LIBERTY TREE Foundation for the Democratic Revolution, Military Families Speak Out, Peace Action, Progressive Democrats of America, United for Peace and Justice, Veterans for Peace, U.S. Labor Against the War, Women Legislator's Lobby, Women's Action for New

Directions

So far, NM Rep. Ray BeGaye has agreed to introduce this Joint Memorial in the House and Senator Carlos Cisneros in the Senate. Co-sponsors include: Rep. Eleanor Chavez, Rep. Debbie Rodella, Rep. Bobby Gonzales, Senator Linda Lopez, Sen. Richard Martinez, Sen. Howie Morales, and Sen. Cisco Mcorley. Senator Ortiz-y-Pino has stated he will carry it on the Senate floor. Contact: www.codepink-taos.org

Efforts Continue to Pass NM Legislation for Civil Marriage

The 2009 New Mexico legislature is considering House Bill 21, Domestic Partner Rights and Responsibilities Act, and the Companion Senate Bill 21, in this session. These bills would confer the state rights, benefits, protections, responsibilities and obligations of New Mexico civil marriage to unmarried, straight and gay and lesbian couples.

Civil marriage provides the legal rights in pensions, health insurance, hospital visitations, inheritance, social security, estate taxes, retirement savings, family leave, nursing homes, and additional benefits that other long-term committed

couples have. Many senior citizens would benefit, straight or gay, by legislation protecting their rights in a civil marriage relationship. Bills have also been introduced at the legislature which *restrict* the civil rights of persons who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or intersex. These bills are called Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA).

A statewide November 2007 poll showed that 62% of New Mexico voters support legal recognition for gay and lesbian couples.

For up-to-date information contact Equality, NM at www.eqnm.org, or info@eqnm.org